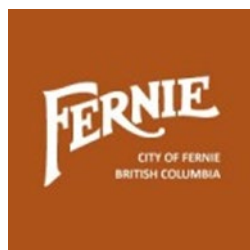


WildSafeBC Annual Report 2022

Fernie

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Executive Summary

This report describes the activities of the WildSafeBC Fernie Program between May 16th and November 30th, 2022. The program area includes the City of Fernie and is located on traditional Ktunaxa Territory (Figure 1). Collaboration with community groups has enabled WildSafeBC to reach a broad range of people, engaging them in a variety of program activities.

As of November 26th, there were 91 black bear reports, which is lower than the past two years but close to the five-year average of 97. Garbage and fruit trees remained as common attractants. Grizzly bear reports (n=6) were also at a five-year low. The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) performed outreach activities with the goal of preventing human-wildlife in the community. The following summarizes key program deliverables over the course of the season:

- There were 11 WildSafe Ranger Presentations that reached 154 youth
- A total of 6 Wildlife Safety Presentations reached 153 participants
- Display booths reached 37 people at the Fernie Info Centre Trailhead
- During door-to-door canvassing, 20 in-person contacts were made
- There were 3 carts placed on the curb the night before collection that were tagged during two patrol nights
- There were 39 Facebook posts that reached more than 1,200 followers, and thousands more through shared content to other pages
- The WCC collaborated with local biologist Dr. Clayton Lamb and Gillian Sanders from Grizzly Bear Solutions for 6 presentations throughout the valley (Jaffrey to Elkford)
- There were 47 commercial dumpsters assessed, with in-person conversations or written notifications handed out to 30 businesses encouraging them to secure bins properly
- There were 4 news articles published in the *Free Press* and the *Online Free Press* and 3 radio interviews were given to spread WildSafeBC messaging
- There were 5 properties that participated in the fruit tree removal/replacement program, and several more were removed by the City of Fernie on property they manage

The storage of garbage outdoors, unmanaged fruit trees and an increase in trail and backcountry use, all contribute to human-wildlife conflict. Ongoing support from sponsors, collaboration with community groups and support from local media has enabled WildSafeBC to reach a broad range of residents and visitors. Moving forward, WildSafeBC is looking forward to working with residents, visitors, and collaborating with community groups to help keep wildlife wild and communities safe.

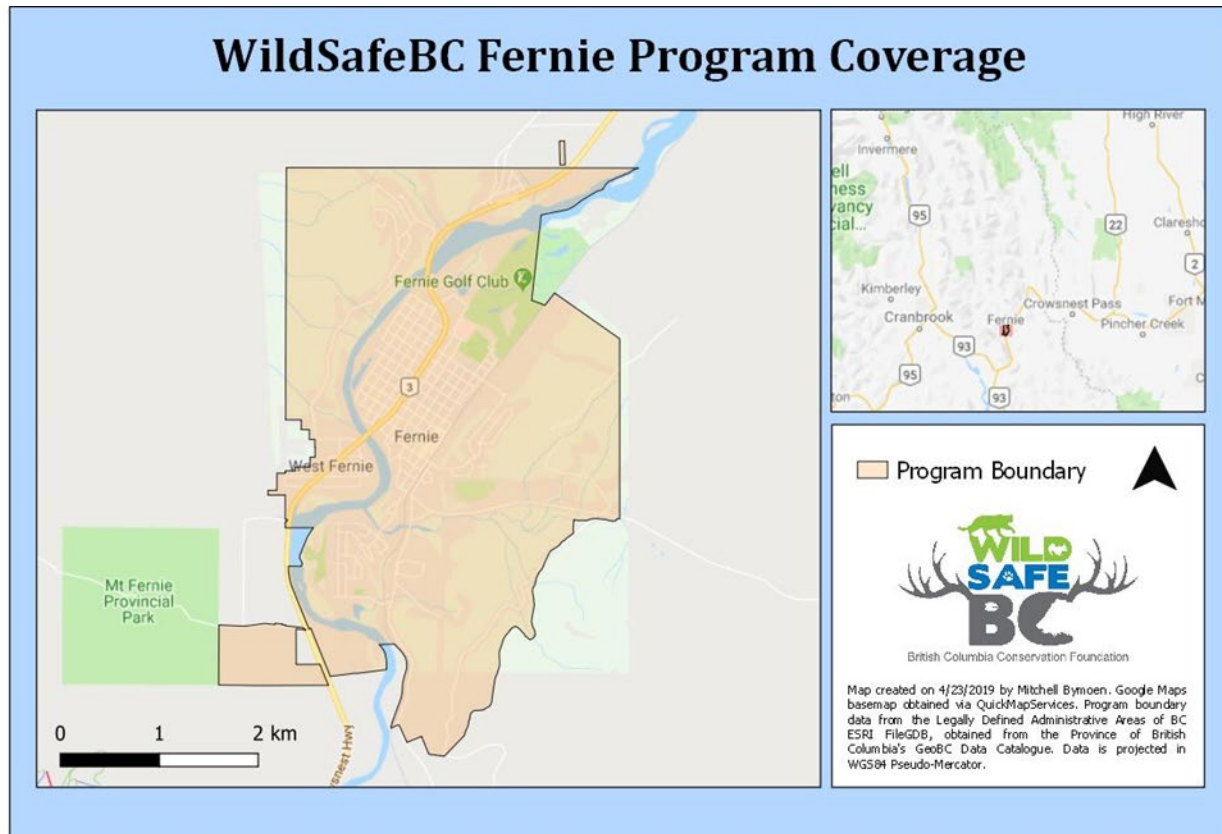


Figure 1. WildSafeBC Fernie Program coverage area.

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Cover Photo: WildSafeBC Fernie Display Booth setup.

Highlights from the 2022 Season

Wildlife Activity

Reports made to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) through the RAPP line (1-877-952-7277) and the online form (<https://forms.gov.bc.ca/environment/rapp/>) are available to the public through the WildSafeBC Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP) on the WildSafeBC website. This data is updated daily and this report for Fernie includes data from January 1st, 2017 to November 26th, 2022 (Figure 2).

For the 2022 season there were 91 reports made to the COS regarding black bears in Fernie. Despite the cold spring this year which brought bears into the valley bottom in search of food, this is lower than the same period in the previous two years (235 in 2021 and 100 in 2020).

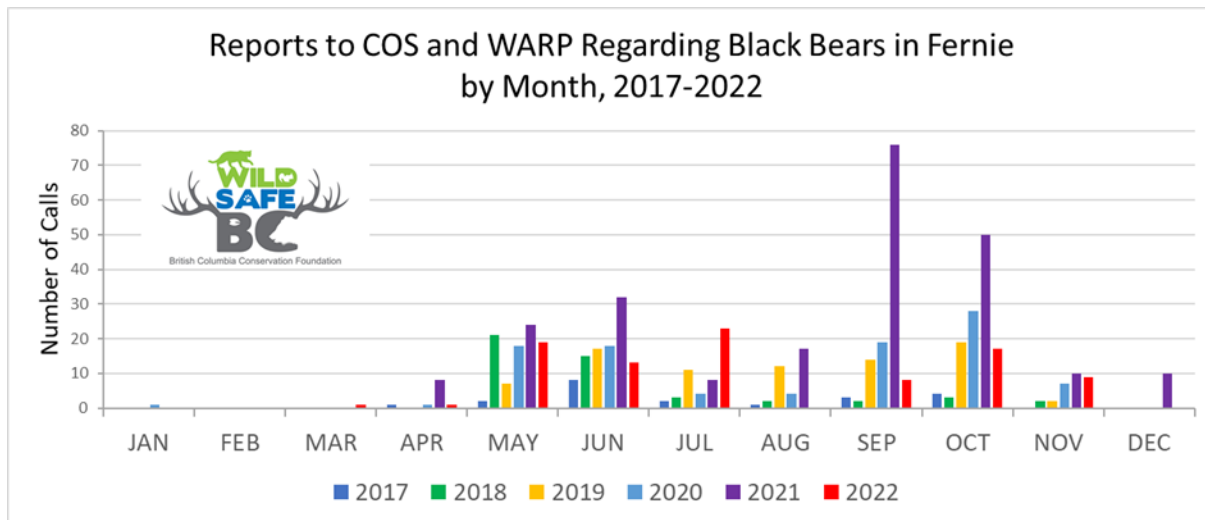


Figure 2. Black bear reports to the COS by month Jan 1, 2017 to November 26, 2022.

Other reported species in Fernie include deer (17), grizzly bear (6), moose (7) and other (5) (Figure 3).

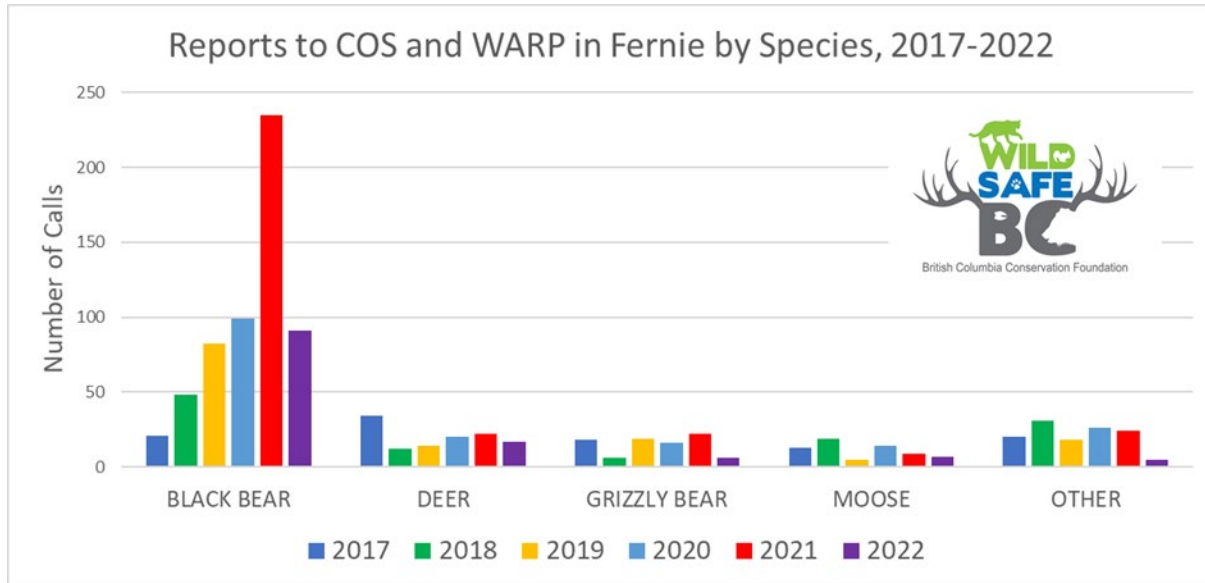


Figure 3. Species reports to the COS by month Jan 1, 2017 to November 26, 2022.

WildSafe Ranger Program

The WildSafe Ranger Program (WRP) introduces youth to the concept of human-wildlife conflict (Figure 4). There 4 schools with 8 separate classes that participated in the WRP in 2022, as well as a summer program at Fernie Alpine Resort. There were 154 students that became WildSafe Rangers and received WildSafe Ranger kits (Table 1).



Figure 4. The WCC engaging a kindergarten class with a grizzly bear hide and skull.

Table 1. Schools and preschools that received the WildSafe Ranger Program in 2022.

School or Group	Grade	Students
FAR Kids Mountain Adventure Camp	Age 6-12	17
Bright Beginnings	preschool	20
I.D.E.S.	Kindergarten	75
Kootenay Discovery School	Grade 2 to 5	15
Outdoor Connections	Kindergarten	27

Presentations to Community Groups

WildSafeBC Fernie delivered seven presentations to 155 participants in the community that included information on local wildlife biology and behaviour, how to prevent and respond to wildlife encounters, and the safe use of bear spray (Table 2, Figure 5). One of these presentations was a collaboration with Gillian Sanders from Grizzly Bear Solutions on the use of electric fencing.

WildSafeBC, Wildlife Biologist Dr. Clayton Lamb, and Grizzly Bear Coexistence Solutions also worked together to organize a series of workshops throughout the Valley; two Coexisting with Grizzly Bears, two bear safety workshops, and two electric fencing workshops. Information about cost-share programs for fruit tree removal/replacement and electric fencing was presented at these workshops, as a solution to help us achieve our goal of better co-existing with the bear populations around us.

Table 2. Organizations that received the WildSafeBC Wildlife Awareness and Safety education in 2022.

Organization	Attendees
FAR New Staff Orientation	50
Fernie Academy	75
MAST	14
Ride Theory Ladies night	3
Electric Fencing workshop	9
Mt Fernie Provincial Park Staff	2
New arrivals to Fernie	2



Figure 5. Collaboration with Gillian Sanders for an electric fencing workshop.

Display Booths

After recent community discussions about cougar and bear activity on the Fairy Creek Trail, a booth was set up at the trailhead. This trail is used by visitors and locals for hiking and mountain biking. During this outreach event, 37 people received information and one person returned to their car to get their bear spray and received instructions on how to use it. As well, two more groups went back into town to purchase bear spray while several groups told me they had seen the bear and were happy they had just discussed what to do in a bear encounter.

Door-to-Door Education and Bin Tagging

Door-to door education resulted in 20 contacts being made in areas with reported human-wildlife conflict. Door hangers were left at residences when there was no one available for an in-person conversation. Bears accessing garbage was the primary reason for requested door-to-door education, though people feeding wildlife (primarily birds) was also a common theme this year, as well as fruit tree management.

Bin tagging is an educational activity where the WCC places a removable warning sticker on garbage and/or compost bins that have been placed on the curb the night before garbage collection. Residential bin tagging was conducted on two evenings the night before scheduled garbage collection. Area 1 (Maintown, Ridgemont and Castle Mountain) was patrolled twice and

three carts were tagged the first night, with none on the second night. Area 2 (Alpine Parkland, West Fernie, Annex and Mountainview) was not thoroughly patrolled, though West Fernie was patrolled twice after reports of conflicts, with zero bins found placed out the night before. The majority of garbage complaints in Fernie are not from bins placed out early, but instead about bears accessing garbage kept outdoors between collection days.

Additionally, 30 contacts were made during a review of commercial dumpsters in the community and the subsequent commercial dumpster educational campaign. During the initial review, 30 out of 47 businesses were identified as having garbage accessible to wildlife. This spring, one bear was destroyed after accessing commercial garbage bins. Although Bylaw 2059 states “commercial waste containers containing any wildlife attractants must be kept closed at all times and closed and secured at the end of the business day in such a manner so as to prevent access to the wildlife attractants by wildlife”, it was clear during this review that compliance was low (Figure 6). When the coordinator reached out and provided education, several businesses were very quick to adopt WildSafeBC Business practices to get back on track. The Fernie Fox went so far as to purchase their own bear-resistant container. However, many businesses faced challenges with meeting the expectations of the bylaw. For example, garbage trucks would not empty commercial bins if they were locked, or they would charge an extra fee to do so. Some businesses, such as restaurants, did not have staff working at the time of garbage pickup to unlock the bins. Another challenge was staff compliance, as many businesses had large numbers of staff turnover that were unaware of the need to ensure bins were kept secure.

Upgrades to the bins were recommended for businesses with large amounts of food waste that still have the older style plastic lid, though supply chain issues made this difficult to accomplish this year. Follow up is recommended next year as plastic lids are insufficient at keeping out larger or more determined bears as they easily bend or break these lids.

It is recommended that WildSafeBC continue to work with the business community and waste management contractor in the future to adopt wildlife safe practices.



Figure 6. A bin that was accessed by a bear overnight and an overflowing bin outside a local business.

Business Pledge

The WildSafe Business Pledge Program has been developed to encourage businesses to adopt practices that will reduce conflict with wildlife to keep their staff and patrons safe and wildlife wild. Through these actions, businesses are setting good examples in their community on how to safely co-exist with wildlife. To take the pledge, a business is required to follow best practices in solid waste management, provide adequate training to staff and support WildSafeBC's safety and conflict reduction information.

The WCC laid the groundwork this year for several businesses to make the pledge next year. Outdoor, non-bear-resistant grease bins continued to be a key starting point for many local restaurants to take part in the Pledge. Other businesses that upgraded and secured their dumpsters this year will be ready to take further steps next year to become a WildSafeBC Business, including staff education and having available wildlife education resources.

Social Media and Press

The community WildSafeBC Facebook page grew almost 10% in 2022 from 1,104 to 1,213 page followers because of 41 posts made to the page over the season. Popular posts included a badger awareness post, highlighting the fact they are a Provincially Red-listed species in BC. Another popular post was about how bear populations are controlled naturally by delayed implantation. Both posts were shared over 40 times.

The WCC submitted several articles and performed interviews with the *Free Press*. Rewind Radio, B104, and TodayFM radio stations also contacted the WCC for wildlife updates and educational messages. A broad range of people, throughout a large geographic area, were reached through four news articles in the *Free Press* and three radio interviews.

Wildlife in Area Signs

The WildSafeBC wildlife in area signs were installed throughout the season for various reasons. Some signs were to alert people that bears were getting into garbage, and to serve as a reminder to put away all attractants. Some were installed after an animal was seen displaying behaviour that could be interpreted as aggressive, such as the grizzly bear that charged a dog walker in Hosmer or the cougar that charged a hiker on the Fairy Creek trail. Other signs were posted because animals were spotted in a particularly sensitive location, such as black bear activity near the elementary school. If an animal was encountered in a safe and natural way, no signs were used, as animal encounters should be expected at any time in this area. There was a collaborative effort between the City of Fernie, the COS, bylaw, and the WCC to decide when and where to put up signs, and to make public notifications on various social media platforms.

Collaborations

The WildSafeBC Program has been well supported, well received and in demand from organizations, visitors, and residents in Fernie. Over the years, the program has collaborated with many community organizations. Events and educational efforts were supported by the

Fernie Visitor Information Centre (Figure 7), Fernie Trails Alliance, Ambassador Wild, the COS and Fernie Bylaw Services.



Figure 7. Display booth set up at the Fairy Creek Trailhead next to the Visitor Centre.

WildSafeBC continued collaborating with Tourism Fernie in keeping the shelves stocked with brochures and putting on an educational booth at the trailhead just outside the Visitor Centre. The WCC also coordinated with Ambassador Wild, putting on a joint booth at the Bayne's Lake Farmers' Market, as well as establishing consistent messaging.

WildSafeBC also continued to collaborate with Wildlife Biologist Clayton Lamb on a fruit tree removal/replacement project which has been well received by the COS and the various districts in the Valley. A collaborative effort between Dr. Clayton Lamb, Grizzly Bear Solutions, and the WCC also brought six bear co-existence workshops to the valley. These workshops provide solutions aimed at reconciling food security with bear co-existence. This included the importance of electric fencing, how it works, and information on the cost-share program available to people in grizzly bear territory.

WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program

Through the WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program, WildSafeBC is able to provide clear guidelines and resources to assist campground operators in maintaining a safe campsite for both people and wildlife. The Fernie Provincial Park was provided with resources after joining the pilot project last year and a bear safety presentation was provided for the new staff this year. The RV Park and Fernie Alpine Resort would be excellent candidates to join the program next

year. These campground areas frequently have bears travelling in and around them and ensuring an attractant free area will ensure these recreational spaces remain safe for both local wildlife and the campground users and staff.

Indigenous Awareness and Engagement

The WCC was invited back for a second year to provide wildlife awareness and safety training for approximately 50 Nupqu staff (Nupqu is the Ktunaxa word for bear). Nupqu is owned by the Ktunaxa National Council and conducts environmental work throughout the Regional District of the East Kootenay.

Special Initiatives

This year the WCC continued working with Wildlife Biologist Dr. Clayton Lamb who acquired the funding through Biodiversity Pathways on the Fruit Tree Removal/Replacement Project, which was started in 2021. The program provides subsidies for the removal of fruit trees that are not well managed and could lead to conflicts. While the focus of this project is to reduce grizzly bear attractants, these trees also draw black bears, deer, and other wildlife into neighborhoods. Therefore removing these trees has the potential to reduce human-wildlife conflicts. There were 13 trees on 8 different properties in the Elk Valley removed (Figure 8). This included 4 properties and 6 trees in Fernie. Several more trees were removed by the City of Fernie after recommendations from the WCC and Dr. Clayton Lamb. These trees will be replaced with non-fruit-bearing varieties.



Figure 8. Crabapple tree attracting wildlife (left) which has been removed by the landowner (right).

Activities included an interview with the Free Press, talking with property owners and promotion of the program on social media. This program generated considerable interest and those who chose to wait until next year should be followed up with in the next season. The COS really appreciated the opportunity to refer landowners with problem trees to the WCC who had the

ability to provide solutions and support to help resolve this aspect of human-wildlife conflict. WildSafeBC would like to thank Dr Clayton Lamb and Biodiversity Pathways for collaborating with us on this project. We are grateful for the funding provided by the Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation and Yellowstone to Yukon Initiative and Province of BC Together for Wildlife Strategy.

Challenges and Opportunities

The storage of garbage outdoors and unsecured between collection days and unmanaged fruit trees continue to be a source of attractants that attracted wildlife into residential areas in Fernie. Many local residents live in small houses or trailers that do not have garages or enough indoor space to be able to store their provided residential bins. Furthermore, Fernie has a large number of temporary/seasonal residents who may not be aware of safe garbage storage practices. Residents and visitors in Fernie are not always aware that bins are an attractant and that the provided bins are not bear resistant. They also may not know about or have the ability to take excess garbage to the transfer station or community dumpster. Fernie, being made up of a combination of long-time residents, seasonal workers, second homeowners and visitors, has a broad range of people, all with different levels of understanding and tolerance for wildlife, especially grizzly bears. Innovative educational efforts and collaboration with other community groups and agencies are required to reduce human-wildlife conflicts. This year educational efforts were focused on commercial and residential garbage storage.

As Fernie continues to grow and develop there will be new people, new bears, and more wildlife in and around the community. Black and grizzly bear activity was reported throughout the City of Fernie and the surrounding recreational areas the entire 2022 season. Backcountry and trail use continues to be at an all-time high, so wildlife sightings are frequent and wildlife safety and coexistence needs to continue to be a focus within this community. Collaborating with groups such as Ambassador Wild and Wildsight to promote safe and responsible outdoor recreation practices is crucial.

The following initiatives should continue to be implemented in 2023:

- Education on how to properly store/dispose of residential garbage in Fernie during bear season
- Work with area managers and residents to find solutions for trailer parks and neighborhoods with small houses with no garages (e.g. Cokato Trailer Park has frequent human-bear conflicts due to garbage)
- Continue to audit commercial dumpsters and push for improved compliance in securing/locking bins
- Continue work with Dr. Clayton Lamb on the Fruit Tree Removal/Replacement Project
- Continue existing education campaigns and collaborations with community organizations such as: Fernie Trails Alliance, Fernie Mountain Bike Club, Fernie Alpine Resort Homeowners Association, Island Lake Lodge, Wildsight, Ambassador Wild, Fernie Information Centre, Grizzly Bear Coexistence Solutions, Tourism Fernie, and RecSafe's Tracey Halliday

- Continue communication and educational efforts with the City of Fernie Bylaw Services
- Promote the importance of preventing encounters, as well as how to react appropriately if one does occur, in recreation areas and encourage safe use of bear spray with local bike shops and at local trailheads.
- Promote the WildSafeBC Business Pledge with businesses
- Continue progress with the WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program with the Fernie RV Resort, the Fernie Provincial Park, and Fernie Alpine Resort
- Continue building relationships with the Ktunaxa and Nupqu with the intention of collaborating on this work with insights from First Nations on coexistence.

The WildSafeBC Fernie Program continues to be well supported, received and in demand from various organizations, residents and visitors in Fernie. Over the years, the program has formed many valuable partnerships and should continue collaborating with community organizations to help keep wildlife wild and communities safe.

Acknowledgements

WildSafeBC Fernie is grateful for the generous support the program receives from sponsors, partners and volunteers. Thanks to our sponsors: the Province of British Columbia, Columbia Basin Trust, British Columbia Conservation Foundation (BCCF) and the City of Fernie. Our community partners have provided invaluable support and guidance. Thank you to: Conservation Officers Patricia Burley and Ryan Gordon, Bylaw Officers Tom Baker and Robin, Dr. Clayton Lamb, Gillian Sanders of Grizzly Bear Coexistence Solutions, Biodiversity Solutions, City of Fernie Staff and Council, *Free Press*, Rewind Radio, TodayFM, B104, Fernie.com, Fernie Trails Alliance, Fernie Mountain Bike Club, Wildsight, MAST Program, Tourism Fernie, Fernie Alpine Resort and the Fernie Information Centre and Chamber of Commerce.